

Frequently Asked Questions for Research to Action: Assessing and Addressing Community Exposures to Environmental Contaminants (RFA-ES-09-001)

Below is a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) and associated answers for *Research to Action: Assessing and Addressing Community Exposures to Environmental Contaminants* (RFA-ES-09-001). We have organized questions and answers into four categories: 1. research focus, 2. researcher-community partnership, 3. application structure and peer review, and 4. grants policy and budget. If you have additional questions or need clarification, please contact the appropriate staff member at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) or National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) listed under “Agency Contacts” in the RFA (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-ES-09-001.html>) and at the end of this document.

1. RESEARCH FOCUS

1.1 What is the definition of “environmental exposure”?

For purposes of this RFA, “environmental exposure” is broadly defined and can include a variety of environmental or occupational contaminants (please read the caveats for social environmental stressors and infectious/vector-borne diseases described in questions 1.2 and 1.3 below, respectively). All projects should focus on environmental or occupational exposures that meet the following criteria:

- a) Are considered a major environmental/occupational health issue of concern to the community involved
- b) Currently lack basic information needed to support the proposed public health action, such as data on exposure levels, sources, or potential health effects
- c) Are suspected to be associated with a health effect that has a large public health burden, disproportionately impact the community of interest, AND/OR are current, emerging or re-emerging environmental or occupational agents with potential widespread exposure.

Applicants should provide information in their application to support that their project meets these criteria.

1.2 Can proposals consider social environmental stressors?

Yes. Applications that consider interactions between the social and physical environment are encouraged. In such proposals, social environmental stressors must be considered within the context of one or more traditional environmental or occupational exposures (e.g., as a potential modifier of the health risk associated with exposure to an environmental contaminant).

1.3 Can applicants propose to study an infectious disease that is obtained through an environmental exposure?

Yes. However, research on infectious and vector-borne diseases is not a high priority area for NIEHS; therefore, applications focusing on infectious or vector-borne diseases will not be considered high priority for NIEHS. Potential applicants interested in studying infectious diseases obtained through occupational exposures should contact Dr. Bernie Kuchinski at NIOSH (BKuchinski@cdc.gov).

1.4 Which exposures or exposure-related diseases fit within the scope of the RFA?

We intentionally left broad the types of environmental/occupational exposures and exposure-related diseases that can be studied under this RFA to allow applicants to submit projects that best address the concerns of the community at hand. As outlined in the RFA, research questions must be co-developed by scientists and community members. In addition, these questions must focus on environmental or occupational agents or occupational or environmentally-linked disease(s) that have been identified by the community as potential public health issues. Environmental or occupational agent(s) should be a current, emerging or re-emerging exposure believed to be widespread or disproportionately affect the community of interest. Exposure-related diseases/adverse health outcomes should either pose a potentially large public health burden or disproportionately impact the community of interest. All projects should focus on an exposure, disease or exposure-disease relationship for which the basic information needed to support the proposed public health action is currently lacking. Applicants should provide information in their application to demonstrate that the exposure(s) or exposure-related health outcome(s) of interest are driven by the concerns of the affected community of interest and will help fill a public health gap/need.

Please note that there are some caveats on examining social environmental stressors and infectious/vector-borne diseases (please see questions 1.2 and 1.3, respectively).

1.5 Is primary data collection required?

Primary data collection is not strictly required. Projects may take advantage of existing data sources if such resources can adequately address the research question(s) co-developed by the researcher-community partnership team and produce the new information needed for the public health action plan.

1.6 How clear is the distinction between environmental or occupational health meant to be? Is combining the two encouraged?

There may be some situations where the exposure of interest is a concern for both workers and the community at large. In such cases, applications can choose to focus on one of these communities or consider both communities. Under the latter scenario, applications should include community partners that can represent the concerns and issues of workers and the broader community of affected individuals.

Applications that span both environmental and occupational health issues will not receive special consideration.

2. RESEARCHER-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

2.1 What constitutes a community?

For purposes of this RFA, “community” refers to populations and groups affected by, or with a shared interest in, environmental exposures and related health outcomes. Populations may be defined by geography; race; ethnicity; gender; age; occupation; religion; sexual orientation; disability, illness, or other health condition. Applicants must describe the relevant community or communities of interest using a set of tangible and explicit criteria (e.g., a common interest, identity, characteristic, exposure or condition).

2.2 What is the definition of “community-based organization”?

For purposes of the RFA, “community-based organization” (or CBO) is broadly defined. The CBO does not need to be a formally recognized organization, such as a non-profit organization (e.g., 501(c)3). Rather, the CBO could be an established community group or network of concerned citizens who have come together in common interest around a particular environmental or occupational health concern. The main requirements are that the community partner must work directly and regularly with the broader community of individuals affected by the environmental or occupational exposure of interest AND be able to represent the interests and concerns of the affected community. It is the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate in the grant application that the community partner meets these requirements.

2.3 Could a government organization, such a local county health department or school district, be considered a community organization?

Please see question 2.2. The main requirements for the community partner are that they must work directly and regularly with the broader community of individuals affected by the environmental or occupational exposure of interest AND must be able to represent the interests and concerns of the affected community. A government organization, such as a local health department or school district, could serve as the community partner. However, applicants should be aware that reviewers may question whether such organizations really represent the affected community of interest. It is the responsibility of the applicant to justify in the grant application that the community partner meets these requirements.

2.4 Who qualifies as an environmental or occupational research scientist?

For purposes of this RFA, any person that can demonstrate a history of doing research that is specific to environmental or occupational health issues would qualify. Such information should be provided in the biosketches for key personnel where applicants list publications and any previous or current grant support for each key personnel.

2.5 Should applicants propose to create an external advisory board?

Applicants are encouraged to create a community-based advisory board or steering committee to facilitate planning, education, outreach, dissemination, and evaluation efforts. However, this is not a required element of the application.

2.6 Can the community group be the primary applicant (e.g., a Tribe, with an academic institution as a secondary partner)?

Yes. The community group can be the primary applicant/lead institution. Organization eligibility requirements are stated in Part II-Section III.1A and Part II-Section III.3 of the RFA entitled “Eligible Institutions” and “Other-Special Eligibility Criteria”, respectively. As provided in the NIH Grants Policy Statement, NIH will review eligibility and may request proof of eligibility or verification of an applicant’s status.

Please note that it is the lead institution’s responsibility to submit the application through Grants.gov. That institution will need to register with Grants.gov (http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp) and NIH Commons (<http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/preparing.htm>) in advance of the receipt date.

3. APPLICATION STRUCTURE & PEER REVIEW

3.1 How should the “research plan” of the application be structured? The RFA indicates that “an approximately equal number of pages should be devoted to each of the three required components of the application (research plan, translation plan and evaluation plan)” in Part II-Section IV.6 under *Other Submission Requirements and Information*.

Applications should follow the standard application structure and page limitations for the NIH R21 mechanism outlined in the SF424. Sections 2-5 of the *Research Plan* is limited to 15 pages total and should include *specific aims, background, preliminary studies* (please note, however, that preliminary data is not required for the R21 mechanism), and *research design and methods* sections. We expect applicants to describe the three required components of the RFA (i.e., the research, public health action and evaluation components) within the *research design and methods* section of the *Research Plan*. The guideline that an approximately equal number of pages should be devoted to the three required components is a rough guideline. We included this guideline to stress to applicants that all three components are equally important aspects of the application package.

3.2 Is a letter of intent required to apply for this grant?

Applicants are encouraged to submit a letter of intent (LOI) to Dr. Sally Eckert-Tilotta (eckertt1@niehs.nih.gov) by March 1, 2009. However, you do not have to submit a LOI in order to submit an application in response to RFA-ES-09-001.

3.3 Are appendices allowed?

Appendices are allowed. NIH has guidelines on the type of materials and number of Appendices allowable. Requirements are listed in the *Instructions for Preparing and Submitting an Application* (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm>) under Part I, Page 113. Guidelines are also described in the NIH Guide Notice NOT-OD-07-018 (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-07-018.html>). Questions regarding inclusion of materials, as well as questions regarding what to do with materials that can not be uploaded to Grants.gov (e.g., documents available in hard copy only) should be referred to Dr. Sally Eckert-Tilotta (eckertt1@niehs.nih.gov).

4. GRANTS POLICY AND BUDGET

4.1 Are foreign institutions eligible to apply?

Foreign institutions are not eligible to apply. A list of eligible institutions and a description of individuals eligible to apply are provided in Part 2-Section III of the RFA under “Eligibility Information”. Please contact Carolyn Mason (mason6@niehs.nih.gov) if you do not find your organization listed and need further clarification.

4.2 Can an application from a domestic institution include a foreign component (e.g., focus on a population in another country)?

Yes. An institution located in the United States (US) may submit an application that focuses on a population in a foreign country. However, any research project with a foreign component must demonstrate that the project presents special opportunities for furthering research that are not readily available in the US and has the potential to significantly advance the health sciences in the US. For this particular RFA, an application with a foreign component should justify how the project can directly influence environmental public health in the US.

4.3 Can domestic applicants include a budget to pay university collaborators and community organizations in a bordering country as well as spending on the US Side?

Yes. Funds to support foreign collaborators can be requested through a sub-contract with the foreign institution(s). A separate sub-contract should be submitted for each institution following the instructions provided in the SF424. Please contact Carolyn Mason (mason6@niehs.nih.gov) for additional assistance.

4.4 Can the grantee revisit, change or modify the scope once the project is active?

In general, the scope of the project cannot be changed from what was described in the grant application and peer reviewed prior to the grant award. Therefore, grant applications must clearly state the intended aims of the project and include comprehensive plans for each year of the requested budget period upfront. In rare circumstances, there may be reason to justify a change or modification in the scope of the project. If such an instance occurs, the grantee must contact the program administrator assigned to his/her grant and receive approval to change the scope of the project prior to doing so.

4.5 Can an organization be awarded multiple grants?

Yes. An organization may submit more than one grant application as long as each application is scientifically distinct. NIEHS and NIOSH reserve the right to make funding decisions based upon portfolio balance, including factors such as diversity in the types and geographic location of communities supported by grants awarded under this RFA.

4.6 Can applicants submit modular budgets?

Yes. Applicants must use the modular budget format as outlined in the SF424. Applicants should not submit a line item budget.

4.7 Do you have guidelines as to what are appropriate salary ranges, for professionals and community health surveyors?

No. Although budget requests will be in the modular format, the total modular budget should be developed using current institutional/organizational levels of support for all participants. Salary support provided by grants may not exceed the congressionally mandated salary cap limitations (see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-09-037.html> for current information). Additionally, NIH has limitations on salary, fringe benefits, and tuition remission for graduate students (see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-07-052.html> for current information).

Agency Contacts

	<i>Institute</i>	<i>Phone</i>	<i>Email</i>
<i>Research program</i>			
Caroline Dilworth	NIEHS	(919) 541-7727	dilworthch@niehs.nih.gov
Bernadine Kuchinski	NIOSH	(513) 533-8511	BKuchinski@cdc.gov
<i>Peer Review</i>			
Sally Eckert-Tilotta	NIEHS	(919) 541-1446	eckertt1@niehs.nih.gov
<i>Grants Management</i>			
Carolyn Mason	NIEHS	(919) 541-1373	mason6@niehs.nih.gov
Mary Pat Shanahan	NIOSH	(412) 386-4453	mpu0@cdc.gov